Pleasure and Wonder in Juan Manuel's *Libro de la caza*

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Juan Manuel's *Libro de la caza* is a technical manual on the selection, training, and care of falcons that also attests his expertise and engagement in falconry.[1] As Fradejas Rueda observes, a distinctive feature of Castilian treatises is the inclusion of personal experiences and anecdotes to temper the seriousness of the doctrinal material.[2] Ruiz goes further. In her comprehensive account of prior scholarship, she contends that *Libro de la caza* functions both as a hunting guide and a tool for aristocratic education, aimed at transmitting values and practical knowledge to the noble class. The anecdotes, she argues, not only affirm Juan Manuel's authority; they illustrate the social and generational bonds falconry was intended to foster among male aristocrats.
The work's blend of information from earlier texts with first-hand observation and anecdotes has captured the attention of Spanish-speaking scholars, but, as Burgoyne laments, it remains conspicuously absent from bibliographies on hunting in English and French.[3]

Recently, Burgoyne has reframed *Libro de la caza*—alongside Alfonso XI's *Libro de la montería* and López de Ayala's *Libro de la caza de las aves*—as "the products of aristocratic scientists who gather information, test their findings, and create new knowledge about the natural world." He emphasizes the spatial dimension of these texts, noting that forest, mountains, and streams are not only sites of investigation but also named and textually mapped. Hunting, in his reading, "produces a hybrid, or alternate, space that is neither the wilderness of LeGoff's medieval imagination, nor the medieval ecumene ..." Rather, it "emerges from the collaborative practices of humans and animals in textually mapped places" ("The Forest Laboratory" 123).

Conceding *Libro de la caza*'s production "by a professional scribe of Juan Manuel's chancery who collaborated with his master … through a combination of direct dictation and editorial independence" (Savo 40) and a dry subject matter that hardly lends itself to stylistic flourish, critics still note its spontaneity and remarkably skilled use of language.[5] Burgoyne extends this observation by interpreting such moments of spontaneity as examples of spatial storytelling within a larger narrative framework, "the story of don Joán." They ground Juan Manuel as a "Master Falconer" in a vivid tale of aristocratic camaraderie and environmental exploration ("The Falconer's Trail"). This article shifts the focus from the spatial to the affective. It examines how *Libro de la caza* articulates the embodied and emotional experience of falconry.

Hunting, or *cynegetic*, treatises are primarily intended to convey technical information, including pharmacology. Savo points out that in the prologue to the *Libro de la caza,* Juan Manuel presents himself as a new type of expert—"vernacular, less educated and unconnected to universities and cloisters" (131). As Savo observes, the *entendimiento*, the practical knowledge he contributes to the art of falconry, derives from his personal experience, transmitted orally within

[1] Critics agree it is one of Juan Manuel's first works. Serés dates it between 1325 and 1326, stating that it could not have been composed before 1329 (xxxv).
[2] "Sin embargo, los textos castellanos introducen otra novedad: la anécdota. Con ella aligeran la pesadez de la doctrina venatoria y farmacológica por medio de la introduccción de hechos acaecidos a los autores a lo largo de su experiencia como cazadores y cetreros" (25).
[3] "The Falconer's Trail" will appear in Brill's *Companion to don Juan Manuel*. I want to thank Burgoyne, who generously shared all his works on *Libro de la caza* with me.
[5] "El *Libro de la caza* está escrito con una habilidad sorprendente en el manejo de la lengua, ya que la materia no se prestaba demasiado a lucimientos de estilo, pero sí a lo espontáneo" (Blecua 23).

courtly networks; for example, through frequent discussions with experienced falconers. Thus, he situates himself in a hybrid space like the one Burgoyne describes; neither fully wilderness nor inhabited land. Intellectually, he occupies a similar liminal position; neither wholly oral, as in the case of an illiterate individual, nor fully aligned with the literate, theoretical orientation of a university-trained scholar.

I want to explore this liminal position. If Juan Manuel was the most prominent prose writer of fourteenth-century Castile, can, or should, we approach his experience of falconry using the interpretive tools typically reserved for the study of oral, indigenous cultures? How does the text articulate the emotions generated by such embodied experiences? To address these questions, I draw on the theoretical frameworks of David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Tim Ingold's *The Perception of the Environment*, and Barbara H. Rosenwein's work on emotional communities.

Abram's influential work argues that, "prior to all our verbal reflections, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world, we are all animists" (57). Moreover, "in the absence of intervening technologies," our animal bodies are drawn into a form of non-verbal conversation with "the more-than-human world" (278). Ingold also challenges the binary opposition of nature and culture, advocating for an "ecology of life"—a dynamic interplay between organism and environment. His analysis of hunter-gatherer perception posits storytelling as a mode of sensory education. The knowledge it conveys constitutes what he terms a "sentient ecology" (9-10), and his assertion that "information is not knowledge, nor do we become more knowledgeable through its accumulation" (21) resonates with Juan Manuel's emphasis on *entendimiento.* Finally, Rosenwein's framework of emotional communities informs my analysis of the formulaic expressions that articulate emotional responses to the practice of falconry. Through personal anecdotes, Juan Manuel embodies our perception of the hunt.

Vocabulary

Juan Manuel delights in "las sabrosas et marabillosas cosas" of falconry. The treatise contains at least fifteen instances of the noun *marabilla* or the adjective *marabilloso/a*, typically in reference to a falcon's swift and violent assaults. The purpose of training falcons, the doctrinal part asserts, is not to suppress their lethal instincts but to carefully assess and harness them to kill in unexpected and wondrous ways. He repeatedly emphasizes aesthetic and emotional satisfaction. Falconers, he notes, derive "muy grant plazer" from watching a falcon's ascent, its elegant maneuvers, repeated strikes, and final blow; he describes these lethal movements as "muchos colpes estraños et marabillosos en que los omnes toman muy grant plazer." Unlike goshawks, falcons take some time to finish the kill, prolonging the spectacle and intensifying the observer's pleasure.

> E porque en todas las cosas en que ha plazer, cuanto más duran son de mayor plazer, por ende es [de] mayor plazer esta caça con los falcones que con los azores e por esso mismo es más apuesta. (307)

Delight is evident in his description of hunting cranes:

> Et por ende á el falconero de catar de qué talante es el su falcón et qué buelo á et cómo se deve lançar, et deve fazer cuanto pudiere por que *el su falcón mate estrañamente et marabillosa*, ca esto se puede fazer mejor en la caça de las grúas que en otra caça. (333-34; my emphasis)

Cranes are among the tallest flying birds, with wingspans reaching nearly six feet, while the peregrine falcon wingspan is approximately three and a half feet. Their struggle is both striking and awe-inspiring. Juan Manuel also finds pleasure in hunting *gallarones* (little bustards), described as "muy sabrosa et muy aparejada para *fazer reír et tomar plazer* a los que la caçan" (358, my emphasis).

A summary review of the *Corpus diacrónico del español* (CORDE) and the Old Spanish Textual Archive reveals that the phrase "fazer reír et tomar plazer" is exclusive to *Libro de la caza*. However, "tomar plazer" is consistently related to hunting. In *Libro del caballero Cifar*, for instance, the emperor is encouraged to go out "a caçar & a tomar plazer," ultimately finding great joy with one of the mastiffs: "plazer & alegría tomó el Emperador muy grande con aquel alano." In Juan Manuel's *Libro de los estados*, the king cites "cavalgar et caçar et trebejar" as activities through which a knight may "tomar plazer" (471). Later in the same text, Julio tells the Infante that "la caça con aves o con canes" is a form of "plazer" that "los omnes toman et vienen por acaecimiento"—that is, unlike basic physiological needs, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, this pleasure is elective and situational (593). *Plazer*, particularly in the phrase *tomar plazer*, is firmly situated in the realm of aristocratic leisure.

A passage from *Las siete partidas* ("Como el rey deue ser mañoso en caçar") offers a close parallel to Juan Manuel's emotional lexicon, substituting "alegría" for "fazer reír" and framing hunting as a therapeutic pursuit:

> Mañoso deue el rey ser e sabidor de otras cosas que *se tornan en sabor e en alegria* para poder meior sufrir los grandes trabaios et pesares … e para esto vna de las cosas que fallaron los sabios que mas tiene pro es la caça. … E *el plazer que en ella reçibe es otrosy grand alegria* commo apoderarse de las aues e de las bestias brauas e fazen que los obedescan e le siruan aduziendo los otros a su mano. E por ende los antiguos touieron que conuiene esto mucho a los reyes mas que a otros onbres. E esto por tres razones. La primera por alongar su vida e su salud e acresçentar su entendimiento e redrar de si los cuydados e los pesares que son cosas que enbargan mucho el seso e todos los onbres de buen sentido deuen esto fazer para poder meior beuir a acabamiendo de sus fechos. E sobre esto dixo Caton el sabio que todo onbre deue a las vegadas boluer entre sus cuydados *alegría e plazer*. (fol. 83v)[6]

Similarly, López de Ayala, in the prologue to his *Libro de la caza de las aves*, frames the affective benefits of hunting in explicitly therapeutic terms. He presents his treatise on falconry to those responsible for educating the sons of kings, princes, and great lords as a remedy against idleness and its pernicious moral and physical consequences—sadness, despair, moral decline, and ill health:

> Acordaron siempre, todos los sabios, que los hombres deben excusarse de mucho estar ociosos, porque es causa y achaque de pecar; porque no ocupándose el hombre en algunas cosas buenas y honestas, nácenle, en consecuencia, pensamientos en el corazón, de los cuales nace tristeza y mortificación; de tal tristeza viene escándalo y desesperanza que es raíz de toda perdición. Y también, así como el ocio, según dicho habemos, traía estos daños y males al alma, así trae gran daño al cuerpo; que cuando el hombre está ocioso, sin hacer

[6] To facilitate reading, I have eliminated the transcription norms set forth by the Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies.

> ejercicio y sin trabajar con el cuerpo y mudar de aires, fatíganse los humores y al cuerpo, consiguientemente, le recrecen dolencias y enfermedades. (51-52)

Together, these examples point to a consistent affective vocabulary linking hunting to joy, physical vitality, and emotional well-being. The term *alegría*, which Antonio de Nebrija lists in his *Vocabulario* as equivalent to the Latin *hilaritas*, appears synonymous with *fazer reír*, suggesting not merely amusement but a deeper sense of joy.

As Salmón explains, Latin medieval sources typically use *delicia*—rather than *delectatio*, which was more frequently associated with sexual pleasure—to denote pleasure as either the absence of pain or a general state of well-being. This definition allowed physicians trained in the Galenic tradition to incorporate practical, experience-based advice into their therapeutic regimes, including recommendations concerning the salutary effects of joy. A notable example is Arnau de Vilanova, who, in his *Regimen sanitatis ad regem Aragonum*, advised King Jaume II to engage in joyful and honest pastimes so that his soul might flourish and his spirit be refreshed. Such common-sense counsel was readily accepted by patients, as it resonated with familiar teachings found in biblical texts, particularly Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (44–52).

Juan Manuel's frequent use of the formulaic expression *fazer reír et tomar plazer* alongside adjectives, such as *placentera* and *sabrosa*, hammers home the affective dimensions of falconry and the landscapes in which it was practiced. Recurrence of the noun *marabilla* and the adjective *marabilloso* registers a profound sense of wonder, casting falconry as more than a noble pastime or practical skill: it was a sensuous and emotional encounter with the environment mediated through the body, an almost supernatural experience. It was also shared with his companions. While their perceptions remain inaccessible, his expressions of joy and awe offer glimpses into their emotional community.

What specific practices gave rise to these recurring expressions, and what did they mean to the Master Falconer and his companions? Their reverberations of laughter and delight correspond with what Abram, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, describes as "a gesture rooted in the sensual dimension of experience, born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole" (74-75).[7] He insists that the sensory life of the body cannot be separated from perception, so language "can never be truly severed from the sensorial dimension of direct, affective meaning" (79-80). He laments the erosion of this somatic resonance with the "more-than-human world," a consequence of technologically diminished bio- and language diversity. I argue that the affective language found in *Libro de la caza* still resonates—albeit faintly. Even as these emotions are mediated through scribal transmission, the autobiographical and anecdotal elements retain traces of phenomenological immediacy—an emotional and sensory intimacy with birds and landscape that still speaks, however distantly, across the centuries.

Resonating with Other Bodies and the Landscape

What makes the deadly choreography between falcons and their prey so captivating? Both David Abram and Tim Ingold emphasize that indigenous practices rely on the hunter's ability to attune with the animal's sensory world through physical proximity, embodied awareness, and emotional empathy. However, consider Alfonso XI's *Libro de la montería*, where the king openly contradicts his uncle and former tutor on the relative pleasures of different hunting forms:

[7] "Ultimately, it is not the human body alone but rather the whole of the sensuous world that provides the deep structure of language" (Abram 85).

> [La montería] dezjmos que es de mayor plazer por que en todas las otras caças non es el plazer saluo en la vista et en fablar en ella. Et en la caça de los venados es el plazer en el oyr, et en el ver, et en el fablar, et en el fazer. Ca çierto mayor plazer toma omne en lo que el faze por sy, que non en ver lo fazer a otre. (3)

Falconry privileges witness, and a better way to account for its affective appeal lies in the concept of kinetic spectatorship and participation developed in performance and dance studies. Caracciolo argues that gazing up as flocks of birds draw dynamic patterns prompts kinesthetic empathy, or "an experienced sense of involvement" that does not depend on cognitive or emotional identification but "affective resonance and physical coordination between bodies" (243). Spectators of dance respond affectively by enacting or inwardly performing the motions with their own bodies. Applying this participatory response to the analysis of fictional narrative, Caracciolo notes it "may emerge in the more mediated context of verbal expression" (244).

Given Juan Manuel's combative temperament and frequent references to falconry as a school of war in other works, may we assume that he emotionally identifies with the falcon's aggression?[8] *Libro de la caza* offers no evidence that he attributes human emotions or intentions to the birds. Rather, the language he uses to describe his response to the hunt suggests a somatic form of empathy—a bodily attunement with the falcon's movements. His affective response is framed as, not psychological projection, but embodied resonance with the falcon's grace, speed, and lethal precision. In one particularly revealing instance, he describes a type of kill as "una manera muy sabrosa et muy apuesta," followed by a rapid sequence of kinetic verbs:

> Otrosí [los falcones] matan las ánades aguándolas muchas vegadas, *et monta[n]do et descendiendo et firiendo* muchos colpes estraños et marabillosos en que los omnes toman muy grant plazer. (307, my emphasis)

Here, the pleasure arises not from dominance or identification but an internalized, almost mimetic response to the falcon's aerial choreography. He goes on to emphasize the exclusive privilege of witnessing its most thrilling moments, specifically the instant when the falcon separates and brings down a crane: "muy pocos son los que veen cuándo los falcones van con las grúas e la apartan e la derriban." The privilege of visual access is presented as an elite form of affective knowledge.

The excitement and disorder that follow—riders, dogs, and falconers converging in pursuit of the wounded prey—are rendered in another cascade of kinetic verbs:

> …et veen cómo sus compañas vienen acorrer ala derribada, et entienden el peligro en que los falcones serán si non fueren acorridos, que allá non acorran todos, lo uno por matar la grúa, lo ál por acorrer los falcones, lo ál por el plazer que toman de los falcones et de los canes cuando bien se ayudan los unos a los otros. Por ende corren allá todos cuanto pueden et non catan por do van; d'ellos çahondan et están en grant priesa, d'ellos caen et vánseles las bestias, los otros corren cuanto pueden. (308)

In stark contrast to Alfonso XI's dismissal of falconry, this scene underscores the synesthetic and dynamic nature of its sensory experience. Sight and sound converge with an intensity that resonates with human and nonhuman actors alike: falcons in flight, barking dogs, wounded prey, and the

[8] This type of reading appears in an analysis of *exemplum* XXXIII of *El conde Lucanor* (Di Stefano 53 n10).

galloping pack of hunters, hoofbeats pounding the trembling ground. The spectacle renders the viewer momentarily speechless, followed by a rising sense of enchantment and awe:

> Et assí por todas estas cosas es caça muy plazentera de veer. Otrosí cuando los canes llegan a la grúa que está derribada, cuánto la toman, [et] en guardar los falcones, que les non fazen ningún mal, et es muy marabillosa cosa. (308).

The orchestrated, almost theatrical display is at once corporeal and emotional—human and animal movements coalesce in a shared realization of intent.

The formulas *fazer reír e dar plazer* and *marabilla* also express Juan Manuel's affective response to the landscapes where he hunted—riverbanks, marshes, lagoons, and coastal areas. His environmental awareness is especially evident in the last chapter, which promises a list of sixteen prime hunting locations across Castile, all validated by his personal experience: "dirá en éste [capítulo] qué caças ha et qué lugares para la caçar en las tierras que don Joán á andado" (352). The list is organized in *obispados* to help readers assess access and abundance: "por que pueda fallar la caça más cierta et más sin trabajo et la pueda caçar más a su voluntad … Et por que fuese más ligero de leer et de entender púsolo todo por obispados" (352). Only the first three survive in the extant manuscript; the rest have been lost or were never compiled or transcribed.

Still, this final section constitutes, in Seniff's words, a "formidable contribution to the geography, topography, and toponymy of Spain" (301). At first glance, it appears to be a straightforward catalog of place names, and scholars often approach it from a strictly geographical or historical perspective. Cardenal Iracheta notices that the carefully designed list for Cuenca maps the entire hydrographic system.[9] Díez Revenga, who studied Murcia, sees a desire to entertain in the personal anecdotes that accompany the toponyms, particularly those that reflect on the practical difficulties of hunting in landscapes altered by manmade irrigation systems.[10] More affectively attuned, Di Stefano describes the list as "an itinerary of memory"; Juan Manuel seems to travel through real geographical space alongside a cohort of ghostly falconers, pausing, as Di Stefano puts it, "to remember circumstances and gestures now lost to us."[11] This reading aligns with Burgoyne's view of the concluding list as a mnemonic construction of space.

Here, I must emphasize that this embodied memory is emotionally charged. These locations form part of the experiential knowledge, the *entendimiento* that Juan Manuel is proudly contributing to the art of falconry. In "The Forest Laboratory," Burgoyne describes it as "a topokinetic and hodological knowledge gained from movement through mapped places, and the memories of forest trails" (114). Juan Manuel is acutely aware that such embodied, practice-based knowledge resists full capture in written form. In an anecdote that highlights the absurdity of depending on textual instruction amid the unpredictable demands of the hunt, he imagines an inexperienced falconer standing in a marsh consulting a soggy book:

[9] "Siguiendo un orden perfectamente claro y definido … pone ante la imaginación del lector todo el sistema hidrográfico del obispado de Cuenca" (29-30).

[10] "El espírittu ameno de don Juan Manuel le hace incluir un suceso de su propia experiencia causado por las dificultades que producen las acequias. La nota personal le da individualidad al relato" (33).

[11] "En el último capítulo —sobre los lugares de caza, y que tiene la apariencia de una árida lista de topónimos—la sucesión de nombres de ríos, claros, charcas, bosques y colinas es esencialmente un itinerario de la memoria; que parece estar recorriendo el espacio real con una imaginaria cabalgada de cazadores y se divierte parándose cada poco, para recordar circunstancias y gestos desaparecidos" (53).

> Que comoquiera que todo está aquí escrito cómo se deve fazer, pocas vezes se guisa que se puede fazer assí; et si el falconero non sopiesse nada de suyo, sinon lo que está escrito en el libro, tarde fará buen falcon; ca siquier cuando lloviesse o cuando se aguasse la garça en el río, si entonce oviesse de abrir el libro para leerle, mojarse ía et sería perdido el libro, et dende adelante non sabrí[a] cómo caçar. (322)

The joke underscores a crucial point: *Libro de la caza* is not a beginners' manual but embedded in a community of practice. For the novice reader—or someone like myself—the absence of explicit, concrete technical guidance may seem disorienting. Yet, as Burgoyne argues in "The Falconer's Trail," the text's *entendimiento* lodges in "a grid of collective hodological memory" that presupposes regional familiarity and oral transmission. *Libro de la caza* reflects a lived, communal tradition of movement through, and engagement with, the landscape. Ruiz called it a space where all the hunters of the past, present, and future can meet (460).

Burgoyne draws on David Turnbull's concepts of topokinetic knowledge, mapping, and storytelling to illuminate the connection between Juan Manuel's personal anecdotes and the landscapes through which he moved.[12] Positing the performative nature of trails, place names function, not as coordinates in a spatial grid, but as "a memory of movements in space" and "environmental clues" that contribute to the "construction of a spatial story."

I want to extend this persuasive analysis by focusing on the affective dimension of the *clue*, which Tim Ingold distinguishes from the cipher based on the contrast between revelation and decoding: whereas a cipher conceals meaning, a clue discloses it through direct engagement with the world (24). In *Libro de la caza*, place names are not the equivalent of "x marks the spot" or zip codes but clues to the deep, multifaceted fabric of the environment. As Burgoyne rightly observes, Juan Manuel's contribution to falconry is fundamentally pedagogical: it aims to educate the senses, cultivate attentiveness, and refine perceptual awareness. I suggest these utilitarian intentions are clues to a revelation suffused and animated by joy and wonder. The inspiration for Juan Manuel's anecdotes arises from a sense of delight—*fazer reír et tomar plazer*—and the emotion of *marabilla*, which are not incidental but integral to the epistemology of *Libro de la caza*: they mark a mode of active, affective engagement with the world, a way of being, as Ingold puts it, "in touch" with our surroundings (25).

The anecdotes link Juan Manuel with both the "brotherhood of woodsmen" across time and the terrain, conceived not as static backdrop but as a dynamic participant in the hunting experience. Streams swell with reeds and shift into marshes; newly constructed irrigation canals and mills alter the paths, transforming the landscape into an unpredictable and occasionally mischievous force. One anecdote exemplifies this fluid terrain-as-actant: Juan Manuel recounts the pleasure of leading unsuspecting companions into trembling bogs ("tremedales"), where they inevitably fall. Here, the shifting topography becomes the occasion for mirth, later narrative, connecting movement, perception, and affect in the moment and over time. This interplay reflects what Abram calls an "oral mode of awareness." Stories function as embodied mnemonics: they "provide a way of recalling viable routes through an often difficult terrain," while the land becomes "a visual mnemonic for recalling" the stories it prompted (177).

In the disembodied context of the written page, however, the anecdotes can strike the modern reader as enigmatic or incomplete. As Abram points out, when written down, oral stories "seem curious at best, and very poorly plotted at worst; something seems missing, some key that would

[12] "Telling a story and following a path are cognate activities, telling a story is ordering events and actions in space and time—it is a form of knowledge-making" (Turnbull 143).

unlock the abstruse logic of these tales" (177). Consider an episode along the Záncara River in Cuenca, where a young sparrowhawk ("rosinor") seizes a black-winged stilt ("ciguñuela") and refuses to release it. Juan Manuel acknowledges the difficulty of capturing the moment's emotional resonance and hesitates to elaborate, fearing disbelief: "Et dize don Joán que si él dixiese toda la manera cómo esto se fazía, que los que lo oyessen lo ternían por maravilla, mas que dize él lo que acaecié et que es verdat" (362). The felt texture of the place is missing—the light, sounds, smells, and rhythms. As Abram observes of indigenous hunters, their stories, when "cut off from the sensuous reference, transposed into the flat and featureless terrain of the page," loose their epistemological power (177).

The emotional resonance that arises through embodied perception, including trust, is also lost. Juan Manuel voices this concern when he laments that hunters are often accused of exaggeration:

> Et por[que] en la caça acaece[n] cosas muy marabillosas et muy graves de creer; et cuando los caçadores las dizen, [dizen] los que lo non son tan caçadores que son chufadores, et fazen grant tuerto e grant pecado. Ca bien crean los que este libro leyieren que lo que los caçadores dizen de las aventuras et marabillas que les acaecen en la caça, que todo lo más es verdat. (362)

He attributes disbelief to the lack of firsthand experience. As he states bluntly, "los que lo non quieren creer [et] lo tienen por mentira, acaéceles porque ellos non son tales que quieran trabajar por veer nin por saber las sabrosas et marabillosas cosas que acaescen en las caças, tan bien de las aves como de los venados" (362). For Juan Manuel, the credibility of these tales inheres, not in verisimilitude, but in participation—the labor of seeing and knowing, of attuning the body to the sensorial and emotional dimensions of the hunt. As Ingold asserts, hunting anecdotes are not meant to be realistic accounts but performative acts that give meaning to human feeling (25). The feeling evoked here is a sensuous perception ("veer [et] saber las sabrosas et marabillosas cosas que acaescen en las caças") arising from an act of attention ("que quieran trabajar por ver [et] saber"). *Marabilla* conveys astonishment, not as a rhetorical embellishment, but as a phenomenological state. As Abram describes it, this "felt sense of being in contact and communion with forms of sentience that are entirely different from one's own" (282) arises only when the hunter is fully immersed in, and resonating with, the living world—attuned to its movement, vitality, and unpredictability.

Joy and Wonder

Juan Manuel's use of *marabilla* to convey astonishment and admiration in response to something unexpected or awe-inspiring may reflect broader theological ideas about wonder, particularly those articulated by Thomas Aquinas using the term *admiratio*.[13] A brief consideration of Thomistic thought on pleasure and wonder can shed light on Juan Manuel's affective vocabulary within the intellectual and devotional culture of his time. As Barbara Rosenwein has shown, religious instruction exerted a powerful influence on emotional expression during the Middle Ages (201),

[13] Nebrija's *Vocabulario* translates *maravilla* as either *miraculum* or *miratio*. The juxtaposition of the two reinforces the fact that Latin *miraculum* is related to *mirari* (to wonder at). The identification of *maravilla* and *admiratio* appears, for instance, in an anonymous sermon ca. 1400 edited by Manuel Ambrosio Sánchez: "Segund dize Aristótiles: 'Propter *admirari* ceperunt filosophari' (dize que *por maravillas* que vieron los omnes ovieron de fazer obras de sabidurías)" (my emphasis). Banco de datos (CORDE). *Corpus diacrónico del español.*

and Juan Manuel's well-established ties to the Dominican Order suggest at least a superficial familiarity with its spiritual and philosophical teachings.[14]

In the section of the *Summa Theologiae* devoted to the passions, Aquinas explores the relation between pleasure and *admiratio*.[15] He considers pleasure a bodily phenomenon common to both rational and nonrational animals, but privileges visual pleasure in human experience because, unlike tactile pleasures, which are often linked to utility and immediate gratification, the pleasure of sight is experienced for its own sake and therefore close to the intellectual delight that accompanies insight and understanding (Miner 170-171). Within this framework, *admiratio* emerges as the efficient cause of pleasure: it arises from recognition of our ignorance and the subsequent desire to understand: "admiratio excitatur ex hoc quod desiderium excitatur ad sciendum aliquid" (*ST* I-II, q. 32, a. 8, ad 2). *Admiratio* leads to pleasure when it includes "the hope of acquiring the knowledge one desires to have" (*ST* I-II, q. 32, a. 8, co.) (Miner 177). The English *wonder* reflects this intellectual and affective interaction; its semantic range encompasses astonishment as well as curiosity and speculation—connotations that also inform the use of *marabilla* and *marabillarse* in Juan Manuel's text.

The connection between wonder and the desire for knowledge resonates with the dynamics Burgoyne identifies in "The Forest Laboratory," where hunters operate as "clinical scientists," gathering empirical data to produce new knowledge about the natural world. Their curiosity-driven inquiry aligns with Aquinas's understanding that pleasure—specifically, *gaudium*, or joy—enlarges both the apprehensive and appetitive powers of the soul.[16] The human spirit (*animus hominis*), he writes, is "magnified or enlarged by pleasure" (*per delectationem magnificari, seu dilatari*) (*ST* I-II, q. 33, a. 1, co.) (Miner 178), and *gaudium*—the *plazer* or *alegría* associated with falconry—is not merely an emotional reaction but a powerful force capable of opening the heart to perception, understanding, and attunement (Miner 178-79). Through the Thomistic lens, Juan Manuel's repeated use of *marabilla* signals moments of intellectual awakening prompted by joyful attunement with the natural world.

Another nuance in the meaning of *marabilla* can be drawn from the choreographic quality of Juan Manuel's descriptions of falcons in flight. In *Strange Footing*, Seeta Chaganti juxtaposes a 1999 motion-capture project (*Ghostcatching*) and representations of dance from the *exemplum* tradition to argue that audiences experience dance as "virtual forces supplementing bodily movement" and perceive those forces as uncanny disruptions of time and space. Drawing on Todorov's notion of *l'étrange*, Chaganti conceptualizes the virtual as something arising from the interaction of the physical body and immaterial forms (9-13).

Juan Manuel's use of *marabilla* similarly evokes uncanny forces that seem to defy expectations. In a heron-hunting episode near the river Bernesga in León, he recounts an extraordinary event ("grant marabilla"). Two falcons were released and flew so high that from the ground, one looked no larger than a dove. A third falcon, his own peregrine, Perlado, was then launched and reached an altitude he estimates at 16,000 *estados*. Never before or since, he insists, had he seen a feat of such extraordinary scale: "ante nin después nunca él tal marabilla él viera fazer a falcón" (332). For Burgoyne, this episode is an instance of spatial storytelling in which the falcons' movement ("visual, aerial, and sensitive to scale") is presented from the perspective of "don Joán," the character-bound focalizer ("The Falconer's Trail").

[14] On his connections with the Dominicans, see Lida de Malkiel.

[15] I am summarizing all the ideas on the passions from Miner.

[16] As Salmón points out, "the connections with a particular bodily part, for most medical authors, marked the distinction between *delicia* and *gaudium* since the first is linked to the body and the second to the soul" (46).

I would add an additional layer: the marvelous quality of this event lies not only in its spatial scale but in its disruption of temporal expectation. Juan Manuel stresses the astonishing speed, the short time in which the vast distance is covered: "tan poco rato pudo andar tan gran camino" (332). *Marabilla* is the affective response to an *étrange* interplay of forces—akin to those Chaganti identifies in dance—where the energy of the three falcons' ascent leaves virtual traces in the air and anticipates their violent, elegant strikes on the heron's body. Most remarkable is Perlado's trajectory, a palpable disruption of any ordinary understanding of time and space.

These uncanny moments may recall the mode of temporal-spatial experience David Abram imputes to oral, indigenous epistemologies in which "time and space have never been sundered" (206). In light of Juan Manuel's affective response to falconry, it is plausible to imagine that such immersive experiences took place during the "tiempos baldíos" he mentions in *Libro del caballero y el escudero*:

> Et porque yo entendí que la voluntad que yo abía de caçar non me empecía para las otras cosas que avía de fazer, nin dexava por ella ninguna cosa de mi fazienda, usélo asaz cuanto me complía. Ca non deve omne por la caça dexar ninguno otro fecho mayor que le aproveche o le empesca a la fazienda o a la onra o a la pro. Más cuando ál non ha de fazer de los tiempos que se passan baldíos, non ay ninguno tan bien puesto para los cavalleros como lo que ponen en monte o en caça. (419-20)

Reiterating that hunting is a nobleman's most fitting use of unoccupied time, Juan Manuel frames these "tiempos baldíos"—freed from the practical obligations of "la fazienda, la onra, la pro"—as moments open to the *étrange* temporality of *marabilla*. His repeated invocations of *marabilla* and *fazer reír* point to wonder and laughter, not as isolated emotional reactions, but immersive, affectively charged experiences that blur the boundaries between action and contemplation, sensation and knowledge. The following section will explore the laughter provoked in such moments as more than a spontaneous response but also a socially meaningful performance.

Laughter, Play, and Power

Medieval Latin lacks a specific term for *humor*, and writers relied on the noun *risus* and the verb *ridere* to denote both the act of laughing and the capacity to provoke laughter (Jones 12). Nonetheless, laughter, like leisure, was recognized as a necessary and therapeutic element of courtly life. As Classen notes, Aquinas saw mirth as a force essential for human connection and *eutrapelia* (wittiness) as a virtue as long as "it was done innocently and without evil intent." In contrast to many theologians, he warned against its absence, which he considered a vice associated with boorishness and incivility (33-34).

In *Libro de la caça*, Juan Manuel draws a meaningful distinction between *fazer reir*—the joyful laughter that arises from delight—and *chufas*, or tall tales.[17] The term *chufas* evokes a specific social dynamic among hunters, in which exaggeration and jests are both telling and contested: "Et porque los caçadores an precio de chufadores, et aun cuando dizen verdat de las cosas que les acaece, dizen las gentes que chufan" (364). Juan Manuel's boast about having killed more than four hundred *gallarones* (little bustards) in a single day may well be an example of contested

[17] On *Libro de Patronio*, Barry Taylor states: "A diferencia de otros escritores de exempla—Gualterio Anglico y Juan Ruiz—don Juan Manuel nunca nos promete risa; donde ellos usan términos tales como 'derisorium' (Pedro), 'ioca' Gualterio) o 'reír' y 'burlas' (Ruiz), don Juan Manuel sólo nos ofrece 'placer,' 'pagarse,' 'deleite,' un concepto más frío de entretenimiento" (185). He further notes that references to humor in Juan Manuel's texts are few and expressed by the terms *reír*, *chufa*, *burla* y *trebejo* (187).

storytelling.[18] However, he explicitly distances himself from this practice, insisting that his anecdotes are true and disavowing the role of *chufador* (fibber):

> Peró non lo quiere él aquí nombrar por que non lo tengan por muy chufador; ca ésta es una cosa que aponen mucho a los caçadores. Peró dize don Joán que en todo quanto á dicho fasta quí que en buena verdat non á dicho chufa ninguna. (334)

This context illuminates Juan Manuel's description of his favorite prank, mentioned earlier, luring his hunting companions into marshes where they stumble and fall, eliciting laughter:

> Et aún dize que sienpre ovo él por costumbre de engañar muy de grado a los [que] andan con él a caça por les fazer entrar en tales lugares que cayan o lleg[u]en a tal lugar que se ayan a reír d'ellos, et cuando por otra manera non los podía engañar, que iba apriesa al logar do él dizía que solía que era el paso, et fazíales creer que quería entrar et que los que venían con él que se metían delante et caían o afondavan, en guisa que avían todos razón de reír. (364-65)

Echoing Aquinas, he insists that it is an act of harmless mischief in which no person or animal is ever endangered, although he does admit he takes offense at those who refuse to participate:

> Et dize que esto tiene él por uno de los plazeres de la caça, pero que esto guarda sienpre de fazer en lugar do el omne nin la vestia non tome daño nin peligro, et dize quel pesa mucho quando se guardan d'este su engaño los quel saben esta manera. (365)

The anecdote suggests that Juan Manuel viewed the hunt as, not only an enjoyable pastime, but also a social game marked by camaraderie, rivalry, and ritualized jest. His prank operates within what Radcliffe-Brown describes as a "joking relationship," a sanctioned form of social interaction in which one party is permitted to mock or tease another with the understanding that no offense should be taken. Beneath a surface of playful antagonism that might seem hostile in other settings, here, such behavior signals mutual familiarity and social cohesion (91-92).

Indeed, the boundary between playful and serious aggression can be thin. In his *Libro de los estados*, Juan Manuel describes falconry as ideal training for combat—a safe environment for honing martial skills.[19] In *Libro de la caza,* laughter functions as a play signal, akin to what ethologists identify as a behavioral cue that distinguishes horseplay from real conflict (Morreall).[20] If Juan Manuel expresses irritation when his practical jokes are met with suspicion or refusal, he may be concerned that they have been interpreted as a serious challenge or insult. Joking relationships, as Radcliffe-Brown emphasizes, are not contractual in the strict sense; participants must not take offense only so long as the joking remains within customary limits. A failure to observe these expectations signals an inability to understand the social code—"not knowing how

[18] "Entre el Castiello et Alcavanate, cerca de la Montiella, ay dos lagunas et para caça de ánades con falcones son grandes, mas para la caça de los gallarones dize don Joán que es muy apuesta et muy sabrosa, et que él mató ´y en un día con aves et con omnes [más] de cuatro cientos gallarones, et otras vezes muchas que vinía por ´y de passada, que matava cuarenta o cincuenta" (361).

[19] "Et en cuanto andudiere a caza debe traer en la mano derecha lancha o azcona o otra vara, et en la izquierda debe ttraer o. un azor o un falcon; et esto debe fazer por acostumbrar los brazos, el derecho para saber ferir con el, et el izquierdo para usar el escudo con que se defienda" (cit. Di Stefano 56).

[20] See section 5 of his entry on Philosophy of Humor titled "Humor as Play and Laughter as Play Signal."

to behave oneself" (104). In this light, Juan Manuel's playful violence must be read not simply as jest but as a strategy for maintaining social bonds and hierarchies.

The implications of his playful, boastful posture are especially evident in his only surviving autograph letter, addressed to his brother-in-law, King Alfonso IV of Aragon. He announces an impending visit to Valencia:

> Quiero vos apercebir porque mandedes a vuestros caçadores que metan mientes en su fazienda que con la merced de Dios luego sere en Valencia con vusco … e set seguro que vos e todos vuestro caçadores de aues e canes vos veredes en rroydo con el rrecabdo que uos leuare para todas las caças. (cit. Di Stefano 56)

The warning to prepare the royal falconers for his noisy, disruptive hunting entourage, unsettling both people and animals, is a pointed rhetorical assertion of power. As Burgoyne has argued, the self-image Juan Manuel constructs in *Libro de la caça* is a sovereign nobleman, whose mastery of the hunt reflects his political authority and claim to parity with the king ("Imagining Nature"). Playful mockery is a coded way of asserting dominance or contesting rank. If Juan Manuel's pranks occasionally targeted high-ranking individuals, such as his nephew and king Alfonso XI or Alfonso IV, he may have sought to subtly assert his equality or even to undermine their public image or sense of honor. In either case, the right to initiate the joke, and to do so with impunity, becomes a form of symbolic control.

This performative function of laughter aligns with Jacques Le Goff's notion of the *rex facetus*, the laughing king, who emerged in late thirteenth-century court literature. Witty, eloquent, and emotionally expressive, he mirrored evolving ideals of courtly etiquette. Art historians note a visual corollary to this new ethos of mirth, the "Gothic smile", in sculpture. Mia Akestam argues that expressions of laughter and joy were increasingly important markers of dynastic identity by which royal families signaled cosmopolitan sophistication and their connection to an international courtly culture (235). In the *Setenario*, Alfonso X offers a portrait of his own father, King Fernando, that fits this model.[21] Fernando III is lauded not only for his appearance and eloquence but also for his ability to play and laugh in moderation and at appropriate times:

> Muy buena palabra suya otrosí en todos sus dichos, non tan solmiente en mostrar ssu rrazón muy buen e muy conplida a aquellos que la mostraua, mas rretraer aun e departir e jugar et rreyr e en todas las otras cosas que ssabian bien ffazer e vsar los omnes corteses e palaçianos. Buena manera auya tomada para ffazer ssus cosas e ca ffazielas ssienpre en la sazon que deuyen sser fechas e segunt conuenje non much arrebatado njn muy de uagar. (fol. 4r)[22]

More recently, J. A. Jones has challenged the view that laughter underwent a Christianization in the thirteenth century, arguing instead for its persistent and complex presence in religious and political life (6). Tracing the figure of the *rex ridens* back to the court of Henry II of England (r. 1154-1189), he demonstrates how laughter operated as a tool for negotiating power and social

[21] Pujol notes that according to Coromines, laughter and smiling are conflated in the middle ages and proposes as *rex facetus* King Jaume I of Aragon in the *Llibre dels feyts*. The crusading saint-king Louis IX of France (analyzed by Le Goff) was Jaume's son-in-law. However, he presents the attribution as an afterthought with no analysis of social repercussions (218).

[22] https://www.hispanicseminary.org/t&c/ac/index-en.htm

status. Of particular relevance to Juan Manuel's prank is Hugh Thomas's study of political humiliation, cited by Jones, which links limited displays of violence and mockery to medieval concepts of honor, masculinity, and legal protection. In contexts where status or legal immunity shielded individuals from serious retaliation, laughter and ridicule could function as indirect forms of attack. Hugh Thomas also notes that while anger could be politically effective, its force diminished when directed against those protected by privilege; in thoses cases, a threat could be more effective when it managed to undermine their masculinity or sense of honor (1074). In *Estoria de España* and *General Estoria,* a sporadic phrase, *riso de escarnio*, may indicate this type of humiliating laughter.[23]

These dynamics were evident at the court of Alfonso X, where performances of *cantigas de escarnio*—known for their provocative humor and sexual innuendo—never aimed at the king himself. Instead, as Alex J. H. Thomas notes, controlled and strategic mockery served to reinforce Alfonso's royal authority in efforts to centralize rule in Castile and assert dominance over a newly formed nobility, increasingly distinct from the traditional feudal aristocracy. These performances fostered solidarity among courtiers and underscored the king's dominance as the sole figure exempt from ridicule (93).

Through hunting, noblemen positioned themselves in a symbolic discourse that determined the political field (Burgoyne, "Imagining Nature" 123). While we do not know the specific targets of Juan Manuel's hunting pranks—low-ranking *monteros* or high-born peers?—we can infer the group's participation in similar displays of power and bonding. Laughter was not merely expressive, a burst of delight, but instrumental, marking territory in a courtly game of honor and hierarchy.

Conclusion

Reflecting on Juan Manuel's liminal position between the oral and literate cultures of his time, I am reminded of Norman Maclean, author of *A River Runs Through It*. Both were shaped by a deep emotional connection to the natural world. Both drew on what has been described as "the unlikely merger of two sources: the Western canon and that other Western tradition, in which men sat around campfires or barstools swapping tall tales" (Schulz 72).

Despite the foundational role of *Libro de la caza* in Castilian falconry literature, it did not generate a literary tradition in the Spanish-speaking world. Instead, López de Ayala's *Libro de la caza de las aves* came to define the genre, offering a more technical and utilitarian approach, with a focus on veterinary practices and largely devoid of narrative anecdotes (Fradejas Rueda 76).

This neglect is regrettable, as Juan Manuel's emphasis on affective experience offers a rare and valuable glimpse into the emotional dimensions of aristocratic leisure. For him, falconry was a demonstration of expertise and a symbolic negotiation of honor and status, but it was also and perhaps more profoundly a source of emotional gratification and embodied pleasure. These affective registers are not ornamental but epistemologically significant. The *entendimiento* that *Libro de la caza* conveys resonates with Juan Manuel's kinesthetic empathy with the many layers of the environment and the choreographic movements of the hunt. His vivid descriptions of falcons beating their wings, locking their talons, and striking herons, cranes, and ducks from the sky reflect a deep attunement with the rhythms of animal life.

[23] It appears in different combinations, such as "en riso e en escarnio" and "escarnio del e riso". One instance appears in the *Vidal mayor*. I have consulted the concordances available in the Digital Library of Old Spanish Texts (hispanicseminary.org).

Fazer reír et tomar plazer and *marabilla* offer an alternative narrative to "the story of Don Joán" identified by Burgoyne. Rather than calling for a representation of reality, it invites the reenactment of an immersive, embodied, joyful encounter with the natural world—one that fosters awe and affirms the value of emotion as a mode of knowing.

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